DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 034 274 CG 004 766

AUTHOR	Propper, Martin M.; Clark, Edward T.
TITLE	Alienation Syndrome Among Affluent Adolescent Underachievers.
INSTITUTION	Great Neck Public Schools, N.Y.; Saint Johns Univ., Jamaica, N.Y.
PUB DATE	[69]
NOTE	17p.
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.95
DESCRIPTORS	Ability, Academic Achievement, *Adolescents, *Anxiety, Gifted, *High Achievers, *Low Achievers, Males, *Student Alienation, Upper Class

ABSTRACT

Dimensions of David's alienation syndrome (pessimism, distrust, anxiety, egocentricity and resentment) significantly dichotomized High and Low Academic Achievers among both Bright and Superior Mental Ability groups of upper middle class male adolescents. Five independent projective and objective measures of the alienation syndrome were employed and all intercorrelations among the tests were significant ($P < .01$). The results also indicated that identical levels of academic achievement, irrespective of IQ level, revealed the same amount of the alienation syndrome. One may infer that these alienation traits are seriously interfering with the effective societal use of the low academic achievers' intellectual resources. (Author)

ED034274

Alienation Syndrome Among Affluent Adolescent Underachievers

by

Martin M. Propper
Great Neck Public Schools

and

Edward T. Clark
St. John's University

ABSTRACT

Dimensions of David's alienation syndrome (pessimism, distrust, anxiety, egocentricity and resentment) significantly dichotomized High and Low Academic Achievers among both Bright and Superior Mental Ability groups of upper middle class male adolescents. Five independent projective and objective measures of the alienation syndrome were employed and all intercorrelations among the tests were significant ($P < .01$). The results also indicated that identical levels of academic achievement, irrespective of IQ level, revealed the same amount of the alienation syndrome. One may infer that these alienation traits are seriously interfering with the effective societal use of the LAA's intellectual resources.

CG004766

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

INTRODUCTION

This study related varying levels of academic achievement to David's (1953) operational personality criteria of pessimism, distrust, anxiety, egocentricity and resentment, which are collectively known as the alienation syndrome. In contrast to most research dealing with alienation as a sociological construct, and recent efforts (Keniston, 1960a; New York Times, 1967) to examine psychological constructs of alienation among college students, this study provided an experimental evaluation of Davids' construct among bright adolescent males.

It is apparent that a significant percentage of our brighter students are achieving in school at a level greatly below their capacities. In his recent study of intellectually capable underachievers Lichter et. al. (1962) concluded that they were "wasting their mental capacities, dissipating their opportunities, and circumscribing their chances for a better life (p.245)".

Blaine (Changing Times, 1968) has described underachievement, as one of the many forms of adolescent rebellion which may be the most subtle and insidious, and which quite frequently remains unrecognized until it becomes too late to save a promising career. Recent efforts to characterize the underachiever highlight the following: (1) individual asocialization (Morrow & Wilson, 1961), (2) minimal concern for the opinion of others, and an externalization of responsibility and conflicts (Rosmarin, 1966), and (3) a significantly different level of emotional maturity, self-assurance, and

intellectual efficiency ~~Form~~ that of a high academic achiever (Davids, 1966). These characteristics parallel the component traits of the alienation syndrome.

Alienation, a popular and multifaceted concept, in contemporary sociology, relates to such notions as powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement (Kirscht & Dillehay, 1967). This investigation, however, focused on a psychological rather than sociological construct of alienation among adolescents. It should also be noted that Davids' alienation variables, despite considerable similarities to psychodymanic factors in personality, are perceived primarily as overt behavior traits, revealed on a conscious level by the individual, and completely within one's introspective and self-evaluative capacities (Davids and Pildner, 1958). The campus ferment, whether in the form of the violent confrontations or the passive "dropping out", are both indicative of an overt rejection of dominant values, roles, and institutions of society by a privileged sector of American youth. Indeed, Keniston (1960b) asserts that "Ours is an age not of synthesis but of analysis, not of constructive hopes but of awful destructive potentials, not of commitment but of alienation (p.4)". He further warns of this alienation as an almost inevitable consequence of our modern society which will afflict significant members of our most talanted youth (Keniston, 1968). In studying this affluent subculture, as contrasted to the disadvantaged and seriously disturbed, among whom alienation is deeply rooted, a keener awareness of the phenomenon of alienation may be found among

adolescents who have been provided all the possible advantages available in contemporary American society. In citing the widespread effects of alienation on the affluent and the poverty-stricken, the young and the old, the college student and the school dropout, and the urban and the rural youth, Yolles (New York Times, 1968) calls for the development of new approaches dealing with the problem. Yolles sees the serious danger

> "that large proportions of current and future generations will reach adulthood embittered towards the larger society, unequipped to take on parental, vocational and other citizen roles, and involved in some form of socially deviant behavior (New York Times, 1968, p.26)."

Halleck (New York Times, 1967) has also emphasized the growing problem of alienated college students who are usually intellectually capable and experience blocking in their ability to perform academically. The student discontent, which has now spread to our high achools, has generated this effort to identify a profile of psychologically defined alienation traits related to underachieving bright adolescents who are potential sources of serious human and societal waste.

This study tested the following hypotheses:

(1) In both Bright (BMA) and Superior (SMA) Mental Ability groups Low Academic Achievers (LAA) will reveal significantly more of the alienation syndrome than High Academic Achievers (HAA).

(2) Identical Levels of academic achievers (LAA or HAA), irrespective of their level of mental ability, will reveal the same amount of the alienation syndrome, and

(3) The objective and projective measures consistently assess the

same dimensions of the alienation syndrome.

METHOD

Sample - In light of limited research in the area of high and low academic achievement among upper middle class adolescents a sample of eighty male seniors were selected from a suburban high school in the vicinity of New York City. This public high school services a residential community in which the parents are predominantly Jewish (83%) and have a mean income of $25,000. It is to be noted that greater than 90% of their graduating class attend college. The sample was dichotomized into Bright (BMA, 110-125) and Superior (SMA, 126-140) Mental Ability groups on the basis of Otis IQ scores. Then, employing regression equations, High (HAA) and Low (LAA) Academic Achievers were identified within each of these IQ groups.

Procedure - In group testing sessions two objective measures (Affect Questionnaire, Self-rating Scale) and three projective measures (Sentence Completion Test, Word Association Test, Thematic Apperception Test) were administered. Each test independently assesses the five component traits of the alienation syndrome.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents the results of the reliability checks on the three projective measures which compare quite favorably with previous reliability investigations (Churchill & Grandall, 1965; Davids, 1955; Davids & Pildner, 1958; Zubin, 1965). All correlations between IQ and the five tests were not significant, and therefore, eliminated in-

telligence as a significant factor in the results of this study.

Since, as it is noted in Table 2, in both the BMA and SMA groups, LAA showed significantly more of the alienation syndrome than corresponding HAA on all five measures, it can be concluded that different levels of academic achievers, irrespective of their level of mental ability, differ in the amount of alienation they reveal. This relationship clearly indicates that Davids' (1953) concept of the alienated man as "a person whose apperceptions reveal relatively large amounts of egocentricity, distrust, anxiety, resentment and pessimism in his personality (p.90)", is consistent with the picture of the low academic achiever identified in this study.

Table 3 reveals no significant differences between the LAA from the different IQ groups for four of the five measures whereas Table 4 indicates that the HAA in each group showed no significant differences for all five measures. These results clearly demonstrated that identical levels of academic achievers will reveal the same amount of alienation, irrespective of their classification in the BMA or SMA groups. These findings also strengthen the evidence for the major hypothesis that LAA can be clearly distinguished from HAA on the basis of Davids' "alienation syndrome".

The intercorrelation matrix, presented in Table 5, reveals significant coefficients between all the direct and projective measures of alienation. These results compare favorably with Davids and Pildners' (1958) findings of only one of the nine intercorrelations failing to attain significance for their control group.

They also present strong evidence that the projective tests measure the same personality traits revealed by the direct techniques, and this consistency reflects positively on the reliability of these measures and the validity of the subjects' responses.

The results of linear discriminate function analysis indicate that the four groups identified prior to the investigation could be significantly established as separate groupings on the basis of the five test variables. Since all HAA versus LAA dichotomies were significantly discriminated by these variables, the evidence confirming hypothesis one are given further support. Similarily, since the LAA versus LAA, and HAA versus HAA, dichotomies were not significantly discriminated by the variables, the evidence supporting hypothesis two are also given additional reinforcement. Thus, different levels of academic achievers, irrespective of IQ level, cannot be discriminated by these scales.

DISCUSSION

The low academic achieving affluent adolescent male group identified in this study shows a personality profile that is quite consistent with Davids' (1953) "alienated man", with Keniston's (1960a) "uncommitted youth", and Halleck's (New York Times, 1967) "washed up alienated college student". However, in comparing Keniston's and Davids' sample to the LAA group identified in this study highly significant distinctions are also evident. Both Davids' and Keniston's subjects were from the very selective groups of Harvard undergraduates. After identifying comparison groups of alienated

and non-alienated Keniston (1960) actually limited his study to 8% of the most alienated sample (n=12). This extremely controlled sampling sharply contrasts with this study's affluent adolescent subsample which included approximately 50% of the total senior class males. It is also notable that they were selected on the basis of their level of academic achievement (with a lower limit IQ of 110) and not their alienation ratings. Keniston's (1968) biographical accounts of his sample's mid-adolescent years reveal continuing academic success despite their growing sense of alienation. In light of their admission to Harvard one would not expect other wise. Nevertheless, the profile of alienation among underachieving adolescents clearly reaffirms Keniston's self-criticism of the extremely limited generalizable nature of his findings, and adds to the comparative strength of the data dervied from this study. It is quite apparent, as educators, mental health professionals, and parents will attest, that a considerable, although not major, proportion of today's adolescents in affluent populations are revealing varying degrees of narcissism and self-absorption, loneliness, isolation, anger and hatred towards parents and the social structure, disbelief, and general despair. One might speculate that some of those identified as LAA will contribute to the rising populations of hippies, demonstrators, college drop-outs, malcontents, and drug users.

Although the results of this study clearly distinguish different levels of alienation between LAA and HAA, it is possible that alienation can be conceived of as a more normative predisposition in modern adolescents.

This is also suggested in Whyte's (1963) study of urban middle class and rural working class college students in which he found the former to be more alienated from the academic system than the latter.

Halleck (1967) contends that alienation becomes an acceptable role to our youth which brings them a certain amount of status and attention. He attributes considerable responsibility to mass media and the arts for emphasizing the bizarre and extreme which is often translated as the norm. Keniston (L968, p.342) makes the most emphatic implication of this normative alienation trend in his contention that "a continuing group of the most talented, sensitive, and suitably predisposed of our youth will be repelled by our society, and will experience a transient and, in many cases, an enduring phase of alienation".

Thus, future research may ascertain whether the presence of these traits reflect developmental trends rather than a rejection of traditional values or a combination of both. In a rapidly changing society, normal adolescent development and adjustment may be undergoing similar dramatic changes. Thus, a better understanding and possibly the reformulation of theoretical and descriptive schemata of personality development may be found in future efforts to isolate determinants of the alienation syndrome, so that it can be dealt with rationally rather than with emotions, as so frequently have been the efforts of the past, is indicated in several ways. The spread of university upheavels and the unrest to high schools demands a deeper understanding of the problem if effective controls

are to be established. Since alienated college students are reported to be the most resistent and apathetic in ~~theory~~ therapy (New York Times, 1967) the danger signals to give immediate attention to the problem among our adolescents is clear cut. Keniston (1968) contends:

> "By trying to understand what it is in our modern world that contributes to the alienation of such young men, we may be led indirectly to an understanding of what is most dehumanizing, unjust, cruel, ugly, and corrupt in our society. And here understanding is a prerequisite to whatever cures we can create (p.342)."

These assertations in the face of increasing student dissent and discontent provide an overwhelming impetus for future depth studies of alienation as a psychological construct. In accord with these needs a Roman Catholic high school population is currently under investigation which should provide informative comparisons with the results from this study's predominantly Jewish, upper middle class adolescent sample. In view of minimal attention to female populations in this area, future studies are being planned to examine these alienation variables among college and high school females. It would also be important to identify the foci of adolescents' disenchantment with society. It would be equally helpful to determine whether this disillusionment is diffuse or specific in nature, and whether it has different foci among students in religious orientated and public high schools,

REFERENCES

Changing Times, "We're pushing our kids too hard". March, 1968 22(3), 25-29.

Churchill, Ruth D. & Crandall, V.J. The reliability and validity of the Rotter incomplete sentences test. In Handbook of Projective Techniques, B. Muirstein (Ed). New York: Basic Books, 1965, 873-882

Davids, A. The influence of personality on auditory apperception and memory. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard Univ., 1953.

Davids, A. Comparison of three methods of personality assessment: direct, indirect and projective. Journal of Personality, 1955, 23, 423-440.

Davids, A. Psychological characteristics of high school male and female potential scientists in comparison with academic under-achievers. Psychology in the Schools, 1966, 3(1), 79-87.

Davids, A. & Pildner, Jr., H. Comparison of direct and projective methods of personality assessment under different conditions of motivation. Psychological Monographs, 1958, 72, No.11 (whole no. 464), 1-30.

Keniston, K. The uncommitted: alienated youth in American scoiety. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1960a.

Keniston, K. Young radicals. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.

Kirscht, J.P. & Dillehay, R.C. Dimensions of authoritarianism. Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1967.

Lichter, et. al. The drop-outs. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1962.

Morrow, W.R. & Wilson, R.C. The self-reported personal and social adjustment of bright high-achieving and under-achieving high school boys. Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 1961 2, 203-209.

New York Times. Excerpts from paper on alienation of students. May 12, 1967,22.

New York Times. Excerpts from statement on drug abuse. March 6, 1968, 26.

Rosmarin, M.S. Reaction to stress and anxiety in chronically underachieving high ability students. Dissertation Abstracts, 1966, 27(5), 163b.

Whyte, D.R. Social alienation among college students. Dissertation Abstracts, 1963-1964, 24(Part 3), 3875.

Zubin, J. Bron, L.D. & Schumer, Florence. An experimental approach to projective techniques. New York: Wiley & Sons, 1965.

TABLE 1

INTERRATER AGREEMENT OF RELIABILITY SCORING OF THE SENTENCE COMPLETION TEST, THE WORD ASSOCIATION TEST AND THE THEMATIC APPERCEPTION TEST

Item	SCT	WAT	TAT
% Agreement[a]	88%	83%	91%
% Agreement[b]	92%	91%	72%
Pearson "r"[c]	.84[d]	.88[d]	.91[d]

[a]Based on 3-category item analysis except TAT which is based on story analysis.

[b]Based on 2-category item analysis except TAT which is based on 8-category analysis.

[c]Based on total alienation scores.

[d] $P < .01$

TABLE 2

RESULTS OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE AND PLANNED COMPARISONS ON THE ALIENATION MEASURES

Test	Source	df	SS	MS	F
AQ	Groups	3	13206.55	4402.18	9.06[b]
	BL vs BH	1	5712.20	5712.20	11.76[b]
	SL vs SH	1	20480.00	20480.00	42.16[b]
	Error	76	36919.00	485.77	
SR	Groups	3	3748.24	1249.41	8.41[b]
	BL vs BH	1	3645.00	3645.00	24.56[b]
	SL vs SH	1	4004.45	4004.45	26.99[b]
	Error	76	11277.75	148.39	
SCT	Groups	3	427.05	142.35	4.22[b]
	BL vs BH	1	192.20	192.20	5.70[a]
	SL vs SH	1	649.80	649.80	19.28[b]
	Error	76	2562.50	33.71	
WAT	Groups	3	691.04	320.34	8.16[b]
	BL vs BH	1	966.05	966.05	34.25[b]
	SL vs SH	1	405.00	405.00	14.36[b]
	Error	76	2143.95	28.20	
TAT	Groups	3	1504.24	501.41	6.40[b]
	BL vs BH	1	819.20	819.20	10.46[b]
	SL vs SH	1	1786.05	1786.05	22.81[b]
	Error	76	5950.45	78.29	

[a] $P \leq .05$
[b] $P \leq .01$

CODE
BL - LAA in BMA
BH - HAA in BMA
SL - LAA in SMA
SH - HAA in SMA

AQ - Affect Questionnaire
SR - Self-rating Scale
SCT - Sentence Completion Test
WAT - Word Association Test
TAT - Thematic Apperception Test

TABLE 3

ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE FOR THE ALIENATION MEASURES FOR THE BRIGHT LOW AND SUPERIOR LOW ACADEMIC ACHIEVERS

test	Source	df	SSy.x	Msg.x(Vgx)	S.Dyx	Fyx
AQ	Among Means	1	73.27	73.27	.	NT
	Within Means	37	14670.90	396.51	19.91	
SR	Among Means	1	10.10	10.10		NT
	Within Means	37	5425.66	146.64	12.08	
SCT	Among Means	1	2.84	2.84		NT
	Within Means	37	1420.24	38.38	6.19	
WAT	Among Means	1	132.66	132.66		4.20[a]
	Within Means	37	1168.40	31.58	5.63	
TAT	Among Means	1	8.34	8.34		NT
	Within Means	37	3571.66	96.53	9.82	

[a] $P < .05$

TABLE 4

ANALYSIS OF COVARIANCE FOR THE ALIENATION MEASURES FOR THE BRIGHT HIGH AND SUPERIOR HIGH ACADEMIC ACHIEVERS

Test	Source	df	SSy.x	Msg.x(Vgx)	S.Dyx	Fyx
AQ	Among Means	1	4.86	4.86		NT
	Within Means	37	21352.64	577.10	24.02	
SR	Among Means	1	56.41	56.41		NT
	Within Means	37	5653.06	152.79	12.40	
SCT	Among Means	1	4.76	4.76		NT
	Within Means	37	1140.13	30.81	5.53	
WAT	Among Means	1	42.17	42.17		2.00
	Within Means	37	781.06	21.11	4.59	
TAT	Among Means	1	51.15	51.15		NT
	Within Menas	37	2375.98	64.22	8.15	

TABLE 5

INTERCORRELATIONS AMONG THE MEASURES OF ALIENATION

Test	SR	AQ	WAT	SCT	TAT	HS
AQ	.53[b]					
WAT	.41[b]	.33[b]				
SCT	.31[b]	.37[b]	.34[b]			
TAT	.40[b]	.41[b]	.47[b]	.42[b]		

a $P < .05$

b $P < .01$